

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2012

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

FUEL POVERTY ACTION UPDATE

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the progress being made in dealing with the issues surrounding fuel poverty and energy efficiency.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 *It is recommended that:*

2.1.1 Members note the progress being made to date.

2.1.2 Establish an ad hoc Fuel Poverty Initiatives Steering Group.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 13 February 2012 regarding Solar Panel Installation, members requested a report bringing members up to date on progress being made regarding the options covering our stock in relation to reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency. The following are some of the initiatives and actions taken to date.

- 3.2 A Fuel Poverty Group was set up with TFEC members in September 2011 and meets on a regular basis. An action plan has been formulated and the overall goal of this action plan is to eliminate fuel poverty across Melton and, while we accept that this is a considerable task, by working in a broad partnership we believe we can achieve a number of key aims and objectives.

The key aims outlined below are based around targeting schemes to reach those households most in need of assistance as follows:

Key aims

- 1 Develop a partnership approach to deliver affordable warmth and energy efficiency to households deemed to be at risk of fuel poverty in Melton
- 2 Establish a housing database for all tenures to target and report on fuel poverty and energy efficiency schemes
- 3 Maximise energy efficiency improvements in private and private rented properties to achieve affordable warmth
- 4 Maximise energy efficiency improvements in Social and RSL properties to achieve affordable warmth
- 5 Signpost vulnerable households to income maximisation, financial inclusion and debt management services

6 Improve the health and well being of residents and reduce health inequalities by minimising the negative health impacts of fuel poverty

A number of articles have been put into the tenant's newsletter and information has been provided to Customer Services to help give advice to customer's calling the Council. The Council's website has been improved to have a 'fuel poverty' section which provides advice and signposts all residents within the Borough on how improvements and reductions in bills can be made. A meeting has taken place with the Rural Community Council on how tenants may reduce energy costs through changing their suppliers. Leaflets have been provided and again tenants are to be given information regarding this. A request of TFEC was to put individual thermostatic valves in suitable voids and this is now being done. This allows tenants to regulate the amount of energy they use more effectively.

For those people with electric storage heaters, we have produced a top tips guide and this is given to tenants when we discuss issues relating to energy efficiency. In addition, this guide is left in all void properties with electric storage heaters for the new tenant to be able to use the storage heaters as efficiently as possible. This guide has been passed for inclusion in the tenant's newsletter, 'In Touch'.

At the last meeting of the Fuel Poverty Group a presentation was made by Cheaperenergy Ltd. The purpose of this meeting was to explore the possibility of supporting tenants to find the cheapest energy supplier by undertaking the work on their behalf to change their current supplier by utilising the comparison websites. This is to be taken forward with an article placed in 'In Touch' inviting tenants to send their gas/electricity bills to Cheaperenergy. They will then do the research for them and then advise the tenant and check if they wish to go ahead before undertaking the switch on their behalf. If there is no benefit to the tenant, then they will be advised of this as well. This will be particularly useful for those people who do not have access to the internet or if they do, find difficulty in using such sites.

- 3.3 The Council has been in touch with Somerby Parish Council to help promote the setting up of an Oil Co-operative within the Parish to reduce the costs of oil through bulk buying. The aim is for a local resident to co-ordinate the setting up of a co-operative, with support of the Council, to achieve reductions in energy costs. It is hoped that this pilot can then be rolled out to other areas within the Borough. Currently we have had a number of expressions of interest in being part of the scheme and we will be setting up a meeting of interested parties to take this forward. A new scheme has been set up in Waltham and as we have some Council properties using oil, we have contacted Waltham Parish Council to investigate the possibility of our tenants joining this scheme.
- 3.4 Through funding obtained by the County Council in partnership with the RCC, the Council has sent staff to a training event for 'Energy Champions.' Energy Champions will be provided with information on identifying fuel poverty, reducing heat loss, grants schemes and fuel payment methods, as well as how to help others to manage their heating controls, get free insulation and find out about the local 4 Ways to Warmth loft emptying scheme for vulnerable people. 2 members of TFEC have also had this training and will be putting this knowledge into practice. An energy awareness session on the 4 Ways to Warmth has also taken place at the Council Offices.
- 3.5 On the 6 March, Members, TFEC representatives and Officers had a presentation from a company called Worcester Bosch. The purpose of this presentation was to obtain a greater understanding of the alternative heating systems available and how these might be utilised for the future. We have a number of properties using oil and

energy storage heaters and before we look at replacing these we need to understand the options available to us. For example in 1 or 2 bedroom flats, can the current heating systems be supplemented by alternative systems such as air-to-air? We are currently in negotiations with Worcester Bosch as to the possibility of a pilot to enable us to make a considered view for the future. Worcester Bosch is currently looking at costs of the systems and their installation and will advise the Council in due course.

- 3.6 The Council has been working with a potential partner to take advantage of funding available from the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP). Brammall Construction has an agreement in place with energy provider EDF to offer significant funding to among others, Local Authorities who have dwellings located in qualifying areas to improve the fabric of the building that would generate savings in energy use. Unfortunately after supplying them with relevant data, they have advised us that as we do not have properties in the lowest 10% deprived areas nationally, we do not qualify for any funding.
- 3.7 In respect of the decision of this committee regarding solar panels, since the last meeting of this Committee we have received further information from Venturetricity, the parent company of Solas Power. This has been passed to the Legal and Procurement sections for their comments. The situation is being monitored on an ongoing basis.
- 3.8 Discussions have taken place with the Energy Savings Trust (EST). This is a body originally set up with Government funding to provide independent and impartial advice on how to save energy and money. Following these discussions, the EST are to provide the Council with a proposal on how to develop a fuel poverty strategy and action plan that would cover a detailed analysis of the current state of our stock and clarify options for the way forward for the Council to improve the energy efficiency of these properties. The Council will also benefit from expert advice on the implications and opportunities afforded by Government initiatives such as the Green Deal and Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). EST would facilitate a stakeholder event bringing together interested agencies for the benefit of the wider community and they also bring the experience of job creation programmes targeted at young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). It is hoped to receive their proposal prior to the Committee meeting.

4.0 **POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The work outlined in this report compliments priorities identified in the Corporate Plan around supporting people and goals of improving the life of people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhood and providing a stock of housing meeting the needs of the community.

5.0 **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The decisions made regarding the way forward on reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency may have an impact on the use of HRA Revenue and Capital monies. The Council will also need to decide whether to pay for the services provided for by the Energy Savings Trust through their role as consultants.

6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 There are no direct links to community safety arising from this report.

8.0 **EQUALITIES**

8.1 The work being carried out is aimed at reducing fuel poverty inequalities across the whole of the Council housing stock.

9.0 **RISKS**

9.1 There are no direct risks arising from this report.

10.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

10.1 Although there are no climate change issues directly arising from this report, if new alternative heating technologies are introduced, this will have the benefit of reducing carbon output.

11.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

11.1 TFEC have been involved in the fuel poverty group and attended presentations from external bodies.

12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All wards which contain Council properties are affected.

Contact Officer: Martyn Bowen

Date: 8 March 2012

Appendices:

Background Papers:

Reference: X: C'tees, Council & Sub-C'tees/CSA/20032012/HR – Fuel Poverty Action Update